

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 5: The Early Daoists – Hermits, Shen Dao, and Laozi

Section 7: The paradox returns: wu-wei

- Laozi also gives us a distinction: between the natural (*all the colours in nature*) and the conventional distinctions (*the five colours*)
 - Tied to a contrast between natural and conventional *desires*
- Laozi's influence makes us *want to* be free from social control
 - Thus we come to desire to be natural
 - To act on the desire is 為 *wei*^{deem:treat as}. Laozi recommends the behavior of *forgetting*
 - To follow *learning* is daily accumulating; his 道 *dào*^{path} is daily forgetting
- You “forget and forget” all the way back to being like a child - before language
 - This symbolizes the natural state
 - In this state you still have natural desires
- This is the goal of 無 為 *wu*^{lack} *wei*^{deem:do}
 - We are to stop following social constructs
- This lands us back in a paradox
 - To guide your life by 無 為 *wu*^{lack} *wei*^{treating as} is to make a distinction between 為 *wei*^{treating as} and 不為 *not wei-ing*
 - However, 為 *wei*^{treating as} is itself a construct—one we learned from Laozi (4.16)
 - Hence a paradox : to get rid of social constructs is to use the construct of ‘a social construct’
- Laozi seems to recognize the paradox
 - Laozi formulates it: *Wu-wei* and yet *wu-bu-wei* 無不為
 - To get rid of *wei* is failing to not-*wei*